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SUBJECT: JAPAN'S GROWING DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN AFRICA

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Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Japan's diplomatic presence in Africa is growing, with new embassies in Mali, Botswana, Malawi, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso in 2008-2009. Hiroki Nakamura, the new Africa-watcher at Japan's embassy in Paris, told us on April 8 that this was an effort to raise Japan's profile in sub-Saharan Africa, in part in response to China's growing presence and influence in the region. He said, however, the Japan's economic assistance to Africa was not likely to grow and that the new embassies would be small and minimally staffed. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) We met with Hiroki Nakamura, the Africa-watcher at Japan's Paris embassy, on April 9, following news reports that Japan was increasing the number of its diplomatic posts in sub-Saharan Africa. Nakamura confirmed that Japan was going to open new missions in Mali, Botswana, and Malawi in 2008, with embassies in Mauritania and Burkina Faso to follow in 2009. He said that the embassy in Mali had already begun functioning and that those in Botswana and Malawi were about to open, if they had not already done so. Noting that Japan had previously maintained some two dozen posts across sub-Saharan Africa, Nakamura said that the five new embassies represented a significant increase and would reduce the number of countries that existing posts had to cover.

¶3. (C) Nakamura at first said that the new embassies were largely "symbolic," but when pressed, he acknowledged that Japan was trying to raise its profile in Africa. He cited China's growing African presence as a reason for wanting to increase Japan's visibility. He noted specifically that China had in recent years discreetly enlisted on several occasions the support of some African countries in the General Assembly whenever the question of assigning a permanent Security Council seat to Japan had arisen, which the PRC opposed. Nakamura indicated that the increased Japanese presence was designed to offset this kind of Chinese influence at the UN. He conceded that given the scale of Chinese activity in Africa, opening the new embassies was a relatively modest effort, but he believed that every little bit would help.

¶4. (C) Nakamura said that the opening of the new embassies should not be viewed as an indication that Japanese aid to those countries was necessarily going to increase, a point he said the GOJ had made to the new host countries. He said that Japan was already among the top international donors of development assistance and that scarce resources militated against the likelihood of significant infusions of new

assistance. Nakamura added that the five new missions would be quite small, with an Ambassador, perhaps another diplomat, and a few local staff. He remarked that another reason for opening the new embassies was the fact that almost all sub-Saharan African countries maintained embassies in Tokyo, and that the GOJ felt a need to reciprocate, especially given the extremely high expense that operations in Tokyo entailed for some, if not most, sub-Saharan African countries.

15. (C) We noted that during our last meeting with Nakamura's predecessor (reftel), the Japanese embassy to Cote d'Ivoire had temporarily re-located to Paris because of the unrest in Cote d'Ivoire at the time. This had caused some tensions for the Japanese in Paris, as the mission to Cote d'Ivoire insisted on operating independently, sometimes without coordinating with Japan's embassy to France. Nakamura said that this situation had been resolved when the embassy to Cote d'Ivoire returned to Abidjan and resumed normal operations during summer 2007, when conditions there had improved and permitted its safe return.

16. (C) Nakamura said that he shared our interest in seeing how France's relations with Africa would evolve, given all the statements the Sarkozy government had made since taking office on the need to modernize relations and end the cycle of European/Western paternalism and African dependency that had characterized the colonial and immediate post-colonial periods. He predicted that making big changes would be challenging for France, given vested interests in both France and Africa in maintaining the status quo. He cited Jean-Marie Bockel's recent loss of his job as Secretary of State for Cooperation as a case in point, with Bockel being moved to another job after his strong statements about reform

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met with opposition from, among others, Gabon President Bongo. The challenge for France would be to institute reform without losing influence, and it remained to be seen if this could be accomplished, Nakamura commented.

Bio Note

17. (C/NF) Like his predecessor, Chie Kinumaki (who has returned to Tokyo), Nakamura is a MOFA Africa specialist and not a member of Japan's diplomatic corps. In his early 30s, he speaks good French and decent English, and said he had earlier studied in France. Some of his colleagues at the Japanese embassy engage in Africa-related matters from time to time, but Nakamura said that he is the only embassy staffer who devotes full-time attention to Africa. He said that he would be here for two years and would then return to Tokyo. He hopes to use his experience in Paris for a dissertation or other academic project in which he is engaged, as well as to further his MOFA career.

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